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BUYING THE CHRISTMAS TURKEY

A radio interview between Rowena Schmidt Carpenter, Bureau of Home Economics, and Roy C. Potts, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, delivered through WRC and 37 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, Monday, December 15, 1930.

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Mrs. Carpenter: Here we are with only ten days left before Christmas! They will fly by in a hurry, so I am sure it isn't too early to be thinking about Christmas dinner. That's why I have asked for special time today and tomorrow for us to make some plans together. Those of you who expect to have a turkey next week will be especially interested in what we are about to tell you today, and all of you will want to tune in tomorrow when some of the nutrition specialists from the Bureau of Home Economics will be with me to prepare Christmas dinner on the air!

Someone has said that thousands of American housewives will be selecting and buying a turkey for Christmas. It is really no small job to choose a turkey that is satisfactory in all respects. It takes a good deal of experience. And most homemakers, at least those of us who live in town, look critically at turkeys only once or twice a year, so we scarcely get enough experience to be sure of ourselves. Fortunately, the government has experts who can help us with this problem. Perhaps it is news to you that Uncle Sam, through men on the staff of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, has examined and graded many thousands of turkeys during the past three years. In fact one man alone, Mr. Roy C. Potts, has graded thousands of turkeys himself. He is here now to tell you what this matter of turkey grading is all about. Mr. Potts, what is the object of your poultry grading service?

Mr. Potts: The principal object of our grading service is to simplify the task of housewives in selecting and buying a turkey. Of course, it also simplifies the problem of the retailer in buying and selling turkeys in his market.

Mrs. Carpenter: I see. Government representatives inspect the turkeys and stamp them.

Mr. Potts: Yes, Mrs. Carpenter, but please don't use the term "inspect" in this connection, lest you cause confusion in the minds of our homemaker friends. There is a service called government inspection, and a label "Government Inspected," but that service has to do with examining meat from the standpoint of disease. That is quite different from grading, which implies the sorting and classifying of a product according to certain commercial and technical factors. It is judged or scored much as you might judge bread or jars of preserved food exhibited by homemakers at a State or County Fair. In our work as we determine the grade, we stamp it on the turkey, or attach a grade label to the turkey.

Mrs. Carpenter: I get the idea. Several grades of turkeys must then be put on the market. How do the retail merchants and homemakers distinguish between these grades?

Mr. Potts: Easily enough. By our labels, and by knowing something about the standards for each grade. You see there are four grades for turkeys, namely, U.S. Prime, U.S. Choice, U.S. Medium, and U.S. Common. Only two grades are generally labeled, the U.S. Prime and U.S. Choice. U.S. Prime is the top grade, and U.S. Choice is the grade next to the top.

Mrs. Carpenter: What are the requirements for these grades, Mr. Potts? On what are they based?

Mr. Potts: Four factors are chiefly considered in grading turkeys according to the Government grades. The first is fleshing. This refers to the amount of flesh on the carcass, especially on the breast, and the amount of covering of fat on the back, hips, and pin-bones. A bird which grades U.S. Prime must be full-fleshed, while a U.S. Choice bird is required to be well-fleshed. A U.S. Medium may be fairly well-fleshed, and a U.S. Common may be poorly fleshed. Very careful consideration is given to the degree of fleshing, and unless the bird meets the requirements of a particular grade it cannot be placed in that grade.

A second important factor is the condition of the skin and flesh. In the grades of U.S. Prime and U.S. Choice only very slight bruises and skin abrasions are permitted, and the birds must be well bled and well dressed. Only a very few pin feathers are allowed on Prime or Choice birds.

A third factor is that deformities, such as crooked or dented breast bones, hunchback, and the like. Birds of the grades of U.S. Prime and U.S. Choice must be free from deformities except that they may have very slightly dented breast bones.

The fourth factor is the crop, which must be empty, or in the case of U.S. Choice it may have been properly removed.

Mrs. Carpenter: Those sound like very logical factors to consider in grading dressed turkeys, and I am so glad to have you tell us about them. But I still want you to explain a little more about the labels so that we homemakers may know whether a bird is U.S. Prime or U.S. Choice or of a lower grade when we get to market.

Mr. Potts: To help the housewife select a U.S. Prime or U.S. Choice turkey each turkey of those grades which is Government graded is labeled with a tag or a gummed paper bracelet on which is plainly printed the words "Government Graded - U.S. Prime" or "U.S. Choice" as the case may be, and also the letters "U.S.D.A." standing for the United States Department of Agriculture, and "BAE" for the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Also the birds which are old, that is, those over one year of age, are designated on the label or tag as "old" or "mature."

Mrs. Carpenter: In what cities will these Government Graded U.S. Prime and U.S. Choice turkeys be available for Christmas? Will they be on sale in the retail markets here in Washington?

Mr. Potts: Yes, they will be on sale in Washington, and we expect also in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, and many of the larger cities. Many carloads of turkeys will be Government graded at shipping points. We will supplement the shipping point grading with terminal market grading. Retail stores which have Government graded turkeys for sale in these cities will advertise that fact together with the price of each grade, so that housewives may know before they go shopping for a turkey where Government graded turkeys may be obtained.

Mrs. Carpenter: Your service and labels should be a great help in selecting Christmas turkeys -- I am sure, homemakers, that all of us will feel especially smart this year and for all time when we stand in front of a show case of dressed turkeys! Mr. Potts has generously offered to answer any questions about turkey grading that come to your minds. You can address your letters to your radio station, or to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. Perhaps at some future time we can persuade Mr. Potts to come back and tell us more about poultry grading, and about egg grading too.

Mr. Potts: I shall be glad to do both of those things, Mrs. Carpenter, answer questions by mail, and come again for a radio talk. I am anxious for homemakers of the United States to learn more about our government grading service because of its usefulness and value to them.

Mrs. Carpenter: Remember, Homemakers, tomorrow during the Farm and Home Hour we will tell you how to cook the turkey Mr. Potts has helped you select. Good-bye until tomorrow.

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